

VZCZCXRO9277
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHTO #0472/01 1420617
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 210617Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8900
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0162
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000472

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (FORMATING ERROR)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MZ](#)
SUBJECT: INCREASE IN VIGILANTE KILLINGS EXPOSES BROKEN
JUSTICE SYSTEM

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Mozambique has registered a significant rise in the number of reported vigilante killings, from 17 in 2006, to 31 in 2007, to 30 in the first four months of 2008. The increase is the result of several factors, including a rise in the cost of living, growing crime rate, lack of police presence, and a poorly functioning judicial system. Thus far, the government has taken few steps to address the killings. Absent a more comprehensive plan to attack the root of the problem, the number of vigilante killings is likely to continue increasing.

NUMBERS TRENDING UP

¶2. (SBU) According to prominent Mozambican sociologist Carlos Serra, the first reported vigilante killings were in the early 1990s, with upwards of 30 such reports per year. With the end of the civil war and subsequent holding of democratic elections, the number of vigilante killings began to fall Q a trend that continued until 2004 (Note: coincidentally, this is the year that Armando Guebuza became President. End note.). In 2006 the number stood at ¶17. The government was slow to respond to a major crime wave in Maputo and several other big cities during 2007, and the number of vigilante killings reached 31. In the first four months of 2008, there were 30 reported cases (11 in Chimoio, 9 in Beira, 7 in Maputo, 2 in Dondo, and 1 in Vanduzi).

THE ROOT OF VIGILANTE KILLINGS

¶3. (SBU) While media coverage tends to be minimal--usually a paragraph-long story relegated to newspaper back pages--sociologists, academics, and NGOs are working to expose vigilante killings as a societal sickness with serious implications for the judicial system. The GRM and police officials acknowledge that such killings occur, but fail to tie them to the root causes. According to Serra, the underlying themes include a weak economy, a poor population, and non-functioning law enforcement and judicial systems. The NGO Human Rights League offers more specific reasons that vigilante killings occur: a rise in the cost of living (especially this year) coupled with a high unemployment rate makes citizens more reliant on thievery and other illegal activities; outlying suburbs lack electricity, creating an environment of insecurity; an

undermanned police force is unable to provide more than a token presence in many parts of the country, particularly suburban and rural areas; citizens distrust the police and lack faith in a justice system that they consider corrupt and inefficient.

¶4. (U) Indications suggest that Mozambicans have lost faith in the overall justice system, from the undermanned, poorly paid police force, to the inadequately conducted criminal investigations, to constant allegations of bribery that allows criminals to go free, to a slow and inefficient court system with an enormous backlog of cases, and finally to the poorly-run prison system. At a recent panel discussion on vigilante killings organized by a Maputo university, one citizen stated that, "we are tired of the violence in our neighborhoods and have witnessed a decrease in crime thanks to vigilante justice." Another noted the corruption in the police, "if the police catch a thief, he is soon released, and the problem is never solved." In response to the surge in crime in 2007, the police put more officers on the streets and set up regular checkpoints, but these efforts did not reach the outlying neighborhoods, where most vigilante killings occur. Similarly, there continues to be a severe lack of judges, the judicial process remains dauntingly slow, and courts have received few resources to clear the large backlog of cases. As a result, citizens continued take matters into their own hands, believing they are sending a message to government authorities to provide a stronger police presence and to fix the court system.

COMMENT

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¶5. (SBU) It is alarming that in only the first four months of 2008, Mozambique has nearly surpassed the highest number of vigilante killings recorded in a year. While the numbers correspond to a general increase in crime since 2007, the government's response of a stronger police presence within the city limits - appears more a band-aid than a solution. Long term solutions, like training new judges and providing more resources to reduce the backlog of criminal cases are still in the infancy stages. In the short term, the government might consider hiring more police officers, paying higher salaries to cut down on corruption, and placing officers in outlying neighborhoods. Absent these efforts, it is likely that the number of vigilante killings will continue to increase at the same rapid pace as during the first four months of 2008.

Chapman